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No. 428

IN THE DARK

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

LILIAN BENNET-THOMPSON

AND

GEORGE HUBBARD

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(The Above Are Subject to Royalty When Produced)

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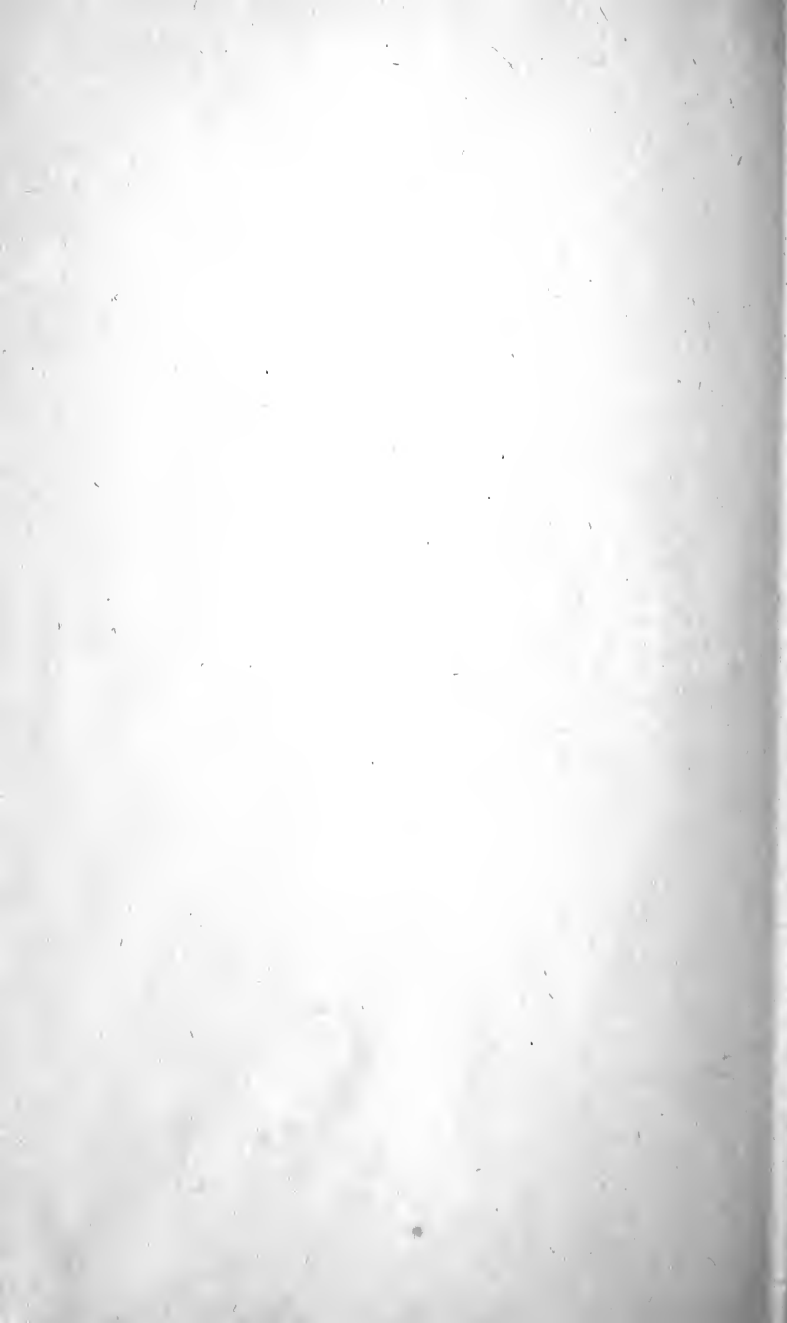
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CHARACTERS

DOCTOR HERRICK.....*The great eye specialist*
GEORGE ASHFIELD.....*The doctor's secretary*
MRS. MASON.....*The janitress*
GRACIE.....*Her little daughter*



IN THE DARK

SCENE: *The Doctor's study. Door left centre, leading to corridor. Door right, to operating room. Doctor's desk, right centre, so that he will almost face audience. Desk is littered with books, papers, etc., and holds an electric drop light with shade. Telephone instrument on desk. Secretary's desk left. Upright letter file against wall, left. Small stand, holding plaster bust of Hippocrates, left of centre entrance. Book cases, chairs, etc. Typewriter on ASHFIELD'S desk.*

DISCOVERED: DR. HERRICK, sitting in swivel chair at his desk, writing rapidly. He is a big man, with an extremely irascible and irritable manner. He is about middle age, and has thick gray hair. GEORGE ASHFIELD, the secretary, is sitting at desk left, writing with pen.

TIME: *Eight o'clock p.m.*

PLACE: *New York City.*

(HERRICK fusses with papers. Starts to write, has trouble with pen, cocks his head to side, listens, turns and glares at ASHFIELD again. Rises, strides across stage, reaches over Secretary's shoulder, yanks pen out of his hand and hurls it on to floor.)

HERRICK. (*Harshly*) What do you mean by using that infernal squeaky thing in my office? How many times have I told you I must have quiet, eh?

ASHFIELD. (*Startled, looks up, half rising*) I'm very sorry, Doctor. I had no idea——

HERRICK. (*With withering scorn*) Had no idea? That's nothing new. (*Stamps back to his own desk and sits down. Then turns around.*) How do you expect I'm going to finish writing this speech before I sail for London to-morrow? Do you think I can work in Bedlam? Are you going to keep quiet? Hey? Are you?

ASHFIELD. Why, certainly, Doc——

HERRICK. What are you writing, anyway?

ASHFIELD. A letter to Mrs. Morehouse. She——

HERRICK. (*Interrupting*) Let me see it. What have you said? (*ASHFIELD rises and starts to go to him, with letter in hand.*) Read it, read it! What are you standing up for? You're not going to make a speech, are you? Oh, sit down, sit down! (*Leans back, scowling.*)

ASHFIELD. (*Reading*) "My dear Mrs. Morehouse: Dr. Herrick regrets exceedingly that, as he is sailing to-morrow to attend the International Convention of Oculists in London, he will be unable to give you the appointment for which you ask. He desires me to say that he is more than sorry that your eyes have been giving you so much trouble, and suggests that in his unavoidable absence you consult——"

(*HERRICK has been squirming around in his chair during the reading of the letter, looking more and more displeased. At this point, he can restrain his impatience no longer.*)

HERRICK. Poppycock! What do you mean by apologizing for me? (*Leaps to his feet, dashes across stage, snatches letter from ASHFIELD'S hands, tears it across and throws pieces on floor.*) Tell her I won't treat her, do you hear? She's so pleased with her beautiful classic nose that she won't wear

glasses, and then comes boohooing to me that her eyes hurt her. But I'm not society and I'm not Wall Street. I take no interest in her social monkey shines or her husband's Stock Exchange hold-ups. She needn't come here again. I won't have her in the office. Tell her to go to someone who's got time to waste on her.

ASHFIELD. To whom shall I tell her to go?

HERRICK. Tell her to go to the devil!

ASHFIELD. Yes, sir.

(HERRICK turns his back and goes on with his work. Comedy business of getting up, adjusting chair and settling himself to work. Business of trouble with pens, light, etc., ad. lib. Writes a few words and then begins to search through litter on desk. Grumbles irritably. Tosses papers right and left.)

HERRICK. (To ASHFIELD) Go to the file and get me my notes on the Hammond operation.

ASHFIELD. I think——

HERRICK. (With heavy irony) Do you? Is it so unusual that you have to stand and talk about it? Get them; they're in the file.

ASHFIELD. They're not there. I was looking for them this morning.

HERRICK. Don't tell me they're not there; I put them there myself. Get them.

ASHFIELD. Yes, sir.

HERRICK. That operation on the Hammond child was the best thing I ever did. It was a most interesting case.

(ASHFIELD, who has taken a few uncertain steps, suddenly turns and starts to speak eagerly.)

ASHFIELD. Doctor, I want to speak to you about a case——

HERRICK. (*Fiercely*) Case? Didn't I tell you not to mention that word to me?

ASHFIELD. It will only take a moment.

HERRICK. I haven't a moment to spare. If you've got anything to say, it can keep until I get back from London.

ASHFIELD. (*Desperately*) But it *can't* keep, Doctor. It's a case of——

HERRICK. (*Cutting him short and taking up his sentence*) A case of your doing as I tell you. You're keeping me waiting, sir. How am I going to finish this address if you stand here talking by the hour? Don't you know I want to get a little rest out of my voyage? Sea trip always agrees with me—braces me up—gives me an appetite. Damme, it makes me feel like a new man.

ASHFIELD. But, Doctor, I just want to explain——

HERRICK. Get me those notes.

ASHFIELD. (*With gesture of despair*) Yes, sir. (*Goes to file.*)

HERRICK. (*Before he has time to look at even one paper*) Well, well, where are they? Are you going to take all night? Can't you do such a simple thing as find a notebook? Give it to me, give it to me.

ASHFIELD. (*Searching as fast as he can*) Yes, sir, I——

HERRICK. (*Rising and going toward him*) Never mind, never mind! I'll get them myself. You never found anything yet.

(*Crosses quickly and pushes ASHFIELD out of the way. Comedy business of looking through the file. Pulls out handfuls of papers and strews them on floor. Suddenly stops and wheels on ASHFIELD, who has been standing respectfully by.*)

HERRICK. It's in the file in the operating room.

And you knew it! Why didn't you tell me, instead of letting me look for an hour? Answer me that!

ASHFIELD. But, Doctor, I tried to tell you, but you said——

HERRICK. Suppose I did? What of it? It's your business to *know* where things are.

ASHFIELD. I'll get them, sir.

HERRICK. I'll get them myself. I can't wait all night for you. (*Crosses quickly and exits right, into operating room.*)

(ASHFIELD makes gesture of comic despair, laughs and begins to pick up scattered papers. Enter MRS. MASON left centre, dressed in shabby black gown. She is a little wisp of a woman, pale and tired looking. Her hair is drawn plainly off her face and screwed into a knot at the back of her head. Her eyes are red with weeping. She looks furtively about, sees that the doctor is not in the room, and comes slowly down stage, carrying a cloth duster in her hand.)

MRS. MASON. (*In a low, wistful voice*) Good evenin', Mr. Ashfield. I'm sorry to be so late. I oughter been here to dust earlier, but Gracie, she—

ASHFIELD. (*Advancing to her hastily*) Well, you can't do it now. Dr. Herrick will never know the difference, anyhow. And, for heaven's sake, don't make any noise. Every little sound irritates him, so you'd better not wait. (*Turns away to desk.*)

MRS. MASON. Did you—did you ask him about Gracie, Mr. Ashfield, sir? (*Speaks very pathetically and plaintively.*)

ASHFIELD. (*Shaking his head sorrowfully*) I tried to, two or three times, but he wouldn't listen to me. He cut me off short, almost before I opened my mouth. I'm sorry, Mrs. Mason, but I'm afraid

it's no use. If I should attempt to speak to him now, he'd simply refuse to listen to me.

(MRS. MASON *begins to cry quietly.*)

MRS. MASON. (*In choked voice, as she wipes eyes with apron*) Oh, it's cruel, that's what it is, Mr. Ashfield. You know, she doesn't understand she's blind; she thinks she's bein' punished for something she done, and it fair breaks my heart to hear her cryin' to be let out of the dark. This mornin' she said she'd be good all the time if we'd only let her see the light again. (ASHFIELD *gives exclamation of sympathy.*) And my doctor, he can't do nothin'. He's been awful good, but he says it's Doctor Herrick's operation, and no one else can do it. I know we ain't got money enough to pay him right off, but I'd work hard—— Mason'd do anything to get enough.

ASHFIELD. I'm so sorry for you.

MRS. MASON. It's like to kill her father. He broke down and cried this mornin' when she begged him not to punish her no more. She says she didn't mean to be bad, and she keeps askin' what she done for us to shut her up in the dark. She'll sit by the hour and try to see her dolly. She'll hold it up and feel its face with her little hands, and then she'll ask me maybe will I let her see it soon. Oh, Mr. Ashfield, won't you please, *please* ask him to help her? Tell him we'll pay him as soon as we can. Me and Mason, we'll work our fingers to the bone to let Gracie see again.

ASHFIELD. Poor little kiddie. (*Eagerly*) I'll do my best, Mrs. Mason, but—(*A hopeless note creeps into his voice*)—I'm afraid it's no use.

(MRS. MASON *turns away, her apron to her eyes, bitterly sobbing. She knocks against the small*

stand at left of centre entrance and the plaster cast falls to the floor and breaks. She gives a frightened little cry and stoops to pick up the fragments, trying to piece them together in a dazed way. HERRICK suddenly appears in doorway right.)

HERRICK. What the devil was that? (*Sees MRS. MASON.*) What have you done, anyway? Can't you move around without breaking everything in the place?

MRS. MASON. (*Rising from her knees and taking an uncertain step toward him*) Doctor, I—you—

HERRICK. That's right. Now *you* start to talk. Everybody talk. Isn't it bad enough for you to come in here and smash up all the furniture, without trying to talk about it all night? Well, Ashfield, haven't you something to say? Wouldn't you like to hold forth for a while? Upon my soul, I believe there's a conspiracy on foot to keep me working all the way over to London. You know it's the only chance I'll get to rest and enjoy myself, but you will insist upon taking up my time.

MRS. MASON. Oh, Doctor—

HERRICK. Oh, go on, go on downstairs, where you belong. Not another word. (*Paces back and forth, up and down, irritably.*)

(*MRS. MASON picks up duster, and with a pitcous glance at ASHFIELD, exits. ASHFIELD drops into his chair, showing anger and indignation.*)

HERRICK. (*Furiously at ASHFIELD*) How the devil did she manage to do that?

ASHFIELD. She struck her arm against the stand.

HERRICK. Well, what did she do that for? Why didn't she look where she was going? Tearing around like a mad bull!

ASHFIELD. (*Controlling himself with difficulty, but speaking quietly*) She didn't mean to do it.

HERRICK. Oh, bah!

ASHFIELD. The poor woman was crying.

HERRICK. (*Surprised. With raised eyebrows*) Huh! Crying? (*Looks blankly at ASHFIELD. Then with return to gruff manner*) Well, what the devil is *she* snivelling about, eh?

ASHFIELD. She was crying because—Doctor, you remember I wanted to tell you about a case—

HERRICK. (*Throwing up his head and giving vent to all his irritation and anger*) Ashfield, I've told you several times that I didn't want to hear about any cases. You've been annoying me for two days with this kind of talk, and I don't propose to endure it any longer. You take too much upon yourself, sir. While you're in my employ, you'll oblige me by doing as you're told. Understand that fully. I've had this in mind to tell you for some time and now it's out. Do I make myself clear?

ASHFIELD. Perfectly clear, Dr. Herrick.

HERRICK. I'm glad of it.

ASHFIELD. (*With suppressed passion*) And I've had it in my mind for some time to tell you that you can have my resignation, to take effect now or any time you please. And now that you understand so much, there are a few other things I want to impress upon you. First of all, I'm not a doormat. No man can talk to me the way you have to-night and get away with it. But that's not the point. Ever since I've been here, I've stood for your irritable, disagreeable temper—(*HERRICK gives an inarticulate exclamation of rage and half rises from his chair. ASHFIELD goes right on*)—because I knew you were a great man in your profession and I was proud to be identified with you. Although you act like a brute, I did give you credit for common humanity. But after this exhibition of callous indifference to

suffering which you might so easily relieve, I don't care to be associated longer with you, and the sooner I can get away, the better I'll be pleased. Do I make *myself* clear?

HERRICK. (*Fairly choking with rage*) Leave my office, sir. Now.—At once!

(*They glare at each other, as if about to come to blows, hands clenched and eyes blazing. There is a tense silence. Then GRACIE'S voice is heard off stage, calling "Muvver!" Enter GRACIE. She comes feeling her way through the dark draperies over the door centre. She is a little girl, with golden hair gathered into a curly top-knot. Her wide-open eyes are blue. She is dressed in a long white nightgown. She comes in very slowly, feeling her way with hands held gropingly before her.*)

GRACIE. (*Calling softly*) Muvver! (*Listens expectantly.*)

(*Both men stare at her in amazement.*)

HERRICK. (*To GRACIE*) Who are you?

GRACIE. I'm Gracie.

HERRICK. (*At a loss*) Well, wha—what do you want?

GRACIE. I wants muvver. Isn't she here?

HERRICK. No.

GRACIE. Oh, dear, I'm so tired! I walked up ever so many steps. It's so dark, and I was 'fraid.

HERRICK. Afraid? Why?

GRACIE. 'Cause it was so dark, and I was 'fraid I'd fall.

HERRICK. Come here. (*GRACIE turns her head, but does not move. She holds out her hands as he goes to her and bends over, putting his hand on her*

head.) Why, this child is ill; she has a fever. Who is she, anyway?

ASHFIELD. She's Mrs. Mason's little girl.

HERRICK. The janitress?

ASHFIELD. Yes.

HERRICK. Well, why is she allowed to roam around the building at such an hour? She ought to be in bed. Is her mother crazy?

(Voice of MRS. MASON heard outside.)

MRS. MASON. *(Outside)* Gracie! Gracie, dear!

(Enter MRS. MASON, left centre, hurries across stage and stops. Looks at doctor in surprise.)

HERRICK. *(Gruffly)* What's this child doing up at this time of the night? What do you mean by letting her run around this way when she has a fever? Have you no sense? A pretty mother you are!

MRS. MASON. *(Stammering)* Doctor, I—

HERRICK. What? More talk? *(Turns on his heel toward desk.)* Take the child back to bed.

(GRACIE, confused, starts to walk ahead and bumps into his legs.)

GRACIE. Oh!

HERRICK. *(Looking down at her)* Well, why don't you look where you're going, little girl?

GRACIE. It's so dark. I can't see.

HERRICK. Dark?

MRS. MASON. *(In strangled voice, with half-outstretched hand)* Doctor—she's blind.

HERRICK. Blind?

ASHFIELD. It's condensation of the lens.

HERRICK. What? (*To MRS. MASON*) How long has she been in this condition?

MRS. MASON. For some time.

HERRICK. Some time? Why haven't you had it attended to?

ASHFIELD. It's your operation, Doctor Herrick. No one else can do it.

HERRICK. Well, you know I can't do it now.

MRS. MASON. (*In horror*) You don't mean—it's too late?

HERRICK. I don't know. I can't tell. I'll have to look at her eyes. (*Starts toward GRACIE.*)

(*MRS. MASON springs forward, losing control of herself and becoming more and more hysterical until she is almost incoherent. In this speech the actual words mean nothing. They are simply to indicate a hysterical outburst.*)

MRS. MASON. Oh, it can't be true, it can't be true! God wouldn't be so cruel. My little Gracie, my baby, my baby!

HERRICK. (*Turning quickly and seizing her by the shoulders*) Come, come! Stop it now, stop it! Pull yourself together. There, there now. Ashfield! (*Makes a gesture with his head.* ASHFIELD comes over and puts arm about MRS. MASON, helping her to his chair. HERRICK strides over to GRACIE, muttering) It's gone so long— (*Bends down and picks up child in his arms. Sweeps papers from desk to floor and sets GRACIE on corner of desk. Switches on electric light and turns it full toward her face.*) Can you see any better here?

GRACIE. No. All dark.

(*HERRICK makes gesture of disappointment. Lifts first one lid and then the other. GRACIE shrinks a very little.*)

HERRICK. Don't be afraid, little girl, I won't hurt you. (*Examines her eyes. Business.*)

GRACIE. (*Cuddling up close to him and speaking in a confidential, pleading tone*) If I'm a very good girl, can I see my dolly to-morrow?

(*HERRICK shows strong emotion, which he tries to conceal. Looks at child and strokes her hair. Lifts her down off the desk. Very quietly to MRS. MASON*)

HERRICK. Take the child back to bed before she catches cold. (*MRS. MASON looks at him in silent agony.*) Well, well, don't wait. Go on.

(*MRS. MASON picks up GRACIE, turns and slowly exits.*)

ASHFIELD. (*Following them to door, looks out after them, then turns and comes down toward HERRICK*) You mean it's too late, Doctor? You can't do it?

HERRICK. (*Explosively*) Of course I can do it. But, you know— (*Looks down at papers.*) Pick up that address and straighten it out. What are you standing there for?

ASHFIELD. (*Slowly*) So that's the kind of a man you are. You think more of pandering to your personal vanity at that convention than you do of that poor child's sight. Good night, Dr. Herrick—and good-bye.

HERRICK. Good night, eh? What the devil do you mean by talking to me like this? You impertinent young puppy! A pretty secretary you are! And what do you mean by not telling me about that child?

ASHFIELD. (*Taken aback*) Why, Doctor, you would listen. You were busy. I tried—

HERRICK. (*Working himself up into a state of righteous indignation*) Bah! I always knew you were an idiot, but I did give you credit for common humanity. A poor innocent little child like that! You knew I could help her, and you wouldn't tell me! I'm surprised, I'm amazed at you! I never saw such callous indifference to human suffering in all my life!

ASHFIELD. (*Protesting*) But I tried—

HERRICK. You tried? Yes; you're always trying. Now see if you can *do* something. Go downstairs and tell that woman to have her child over at the hospital to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.

ASHFIELD. (*In delight*) You mean you're going to do it?

HERRICK. (*Gruffly*) None of your business what *I'm* going to do. *You* do as you're told. (*ASHFIELD starts quickly up toward door.*) And, Ashfield! After you've done that, telephone to the Cunard Line and cancel my passage for to-morrow.

ASHFIELD. But the convention, Doctor? Your address—

HERRICK. Damn the address! (*ASHFIELD struggles vainly with a smile. Suspiciously*) What are you laughing at, eh? I guess I can stay at home if I want to. I hate an ocean trip, anyway. I'm always seasick, you know that. What the devil are you waiting for?

ASHFIELD. But, Doctor, my resignation—

HERRICK. Resignation be damned! Who told you you could resign? When I'm through with you, I'll discharge you. Why didn't you tell me about this case quietly and calmly, instead of losing your temper and talking a lot of nonsense? You're not without brains, but, hang it all, sir, you have no self-control! (*ASHFIELD grins broadly.*) Well, what are you giggling about now?

ASHFIELD. I just want to say—

HERRICK. Oh, of course! You want to talk. Now will you please give me a chance to get a word in edgewise once in a while? Oh, go on, go on!

(Exit ASHFIELD. HERRICK comes down, and picks up hair ribbon which has fallen from GRACIE'S curls. Looks at it with a tender smile.)

HERRICK. *(Sympathetically)* Poor little thing! Wanted to see her dolly— *(Suddenly makes a dash for the door. Shouting)* And, Ashfield! Tell her to bring that doll, too! *(Comes down slowly to desk. Sees papers of address scattered about, picks them up and looks at them ruefully. Speaks half wistfully, but with a suggestion of his usual irascibility)* I didn't want to go to the damn convention anyway!

CURTAIN

The Touch-Down

A comedy in four acts, by Marion Short. 8 males, 6 females, but any number of characters can be introduced in the ensembles. Costumes modern. One interior scene throughout the play. Time, 2½ hours.

This play, written for the use of clever amateurs, is the story of life in Siddell, a Pennsylvania co-educational college. It deals with the vicissitudes and final triumph of the Siddell Football Eleven, and the humorous and dramatic incidents connected therewith.

"The Touch-Down" has the true varsity atmosphere, college songs are sung, and the piece is lively and entertaining throughout. High schools will make no mistake in producing this play. We strongly recommend it as a high-class and well-written comedy.

Price, 30 Cents.

Hurry, Hurry, Hurry

A comedy in three acts, by LeRoy Arnold. 5 males, 4 females. One interior scene. Costumes modern. Plays 2¼ hours.

The story is based on the will of an eccentric aunt. It stipulates that her pretty niece must be affianced before she is twenty-one, and married to her fiancé within a year, if she is to get her spinster relative's million. Father has nice notions of honor and fails to tell daughter about the will, so that she may make her choice untrammelled by any other consideration than that of true love. The action all takes place in the evening the midnight of which will see her reach twenty-one. Time is therefore short, and it is hurry, hurry, hurry, if she is to become engaged and thus save her father from impending bankruptcy.

The situations are intrinsically funny and the dialogue is sprightly. The characters are natural and unaffected and the action moves with a snap such as should be expected from its title. Price, 30 Cents.

The Varsity Coach

A three-act play of college life, by Marion Short, specially adapted to performance by amateurs or high school students. 5 males 6 females, but any number of boys and girls may be introduced in the action of the play. Two settings necessary, a college boy's room and the university campus. Time, about 2 hours.

Like many another college boy, "Bob" Selby, an all-round popular college man, becomes possessed of the idea that athletic prowess is more to be desired than scholarship. He is surprised in the midst of a "spread" in his room in Regatta week by a visit from his aunt who is putting him through college. Aunt Serena, "a lady of the old school and the dearest little woman in the whole world," has hastened to make this visit to her adored nephew under the mistaken impression that he is about to receive the Fellowes prize for scholarship. Her grief and chagrin when she learns that instead of the prize Robert has received "a pink card," which is equivalent to suspension for poor scholarship, gives a touch of pathos to an otherwise jolly comedy of college life. How the repentant Robert more than redeems himself, carries off honors at the last, and in the end wins Ruth, the faithful little sweetheart of the "Prom" and the classroom, makes a story of dramatic interest and brings out very clearly certain phases of modern college life. There are several opportunities for the introduction of college songs and "stunts."

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The Return of Hi Jinks

A comedy in four acts, by Marion Short, author of "The Varsity Coach," "The Touch-Down," etc. 6 males, 8 females. Costumes modern. One interior scene.

This comedy is founded upon and elaborated from a farce comedy in two acts written by J. H. Horta, and originally produced at Tuft's College.

Hiram Poynter Jinks, a Junior in Hoosic College (Willie Collier type), and a young moving picture actress (Mary Pickford type), are the leading characters in this lively, modern farce.

Thomas Hodge, a Senior, envious of the popularity of Jinks, wishes to think up a scheme to throw ridicule upon him during a visit of the Hoosic Glee Club to Jinks's home town. Jinks has obligingly acted as a one-day substitute in a moving picture play, in which there is a fire scene, and this gives Hodge his cue. He sends what seems to be a bona fide account of Jink's heroism at a Hoosic fire to Jink's home paper. Instead of repudiating his laurels as expected, Jinks decides to take a flyer in fame, confirms the fake story, confesses to being a hero and is adored by all the girls, to the chagrin and discomfiture of Hodge. Of course, the truth comes out at last, but Jinks is not hurt thereby, and his romance with Mimi Mayflower comes to a successful termination.

This is a great comedy for amateurs. It is full of funny situations and is sure to please. Price, 30 Cents.

June

A most successful comedy-drama in four acts, by Marie Doran, author of "The New Co-Ed," "Tempest and Sunshine," "Dorothy's Neighbors," etc. 4 males, 8 females. One interior scene. Costumes modern. Plays 2¼ hours.

This play has a very interesting group of young people. June is an appealing little figure, an orphan living with her aunt. There are a number of delightful, life-like characters: the sorely tried likeable Mrs. Hopkins, the amusing, haughty Miss Banks of the glove department, the lively Tilly and Milly, who work in the store, and ambitious Snoozer; Mrs. Hopkins's only son, who aspires to be President of the United States, but finds his real sphere is running the local trolley car. The play is simplicity itself in the telling of an every-day story, and the scenic requirements call for only one set, a room in the boarding house of Mrs. Hopkins, while an opportunity is afforded to introduce any number of extra characters. Musical numbers may be introduced, if desired. Price, 30 Cents.

Tempest and Sunshine

A comedy drama in four acts, by Marie Doran. 5 males and 3 females. One exterior and three interior scenes. Plays about 2 hours.

Every school girl has revelled in the sweet simplicity and gentleness of the characters interwoven in the charms that Mary J. Holmes commands in her story of "Tempest and Sunshine." We can strongly recommend this play as one of the best plays for high school production published in recent years. Price, 30 Cents.

(The Above Are Subject to Royalty When Produced)

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